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ABSTRACT

The roles and expectations of school psychologists are expanding. Practitioners are increasingly being asked to move beyond the testing expectations to provide effective counseling and consultation interventions. Training programs are expected to create balanced, functioning practitioners who will make positive impacts on children's lives. This study examines future school psychologists' response to the Millon Inventory for Personality Styles (MIPS). The MIPS is designed to examine normal behavior along the axes of Motivating Aims, Cognitive Modes, and Interpersonal Behaviors. Promising information was provided by using the MIPS to classify students with interpersonal skills consistent with the demands of the school psychology profession, although there was no information to describe low performance. The narrative information provided by the scoring program provided some insight into the personality functioning of the individual. Responses are examined for a group of future school psychologists and related to their performance in the field. (JDM)

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Interpersonal Assessment of Future School Psychologists

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Abstract

The roles and expectations of school psychologists are expanding. Increasingly, practitioners are expected to move beyond the testing expectations and provide effective counseling and consultation interventions. Training programs are increasingly expected to turn out balanced, functioning practitioners who will make positive impacts in children's lives. Sometimes the most knowledgeable and expertly trained school psychologist is compromised because of unsuccessful interpersonal contacts.

This study examines future school psychologists' responses to the Millon Inventory for Personality Styles (MIPS). The MIPS is designed to examine "normal" behavior along the axes of Motivating Aims, Cognitive Modes and Interpersonal Behaviors. Responses will be examined for a group of future school psychologists and related to their performance in the field. There will be an opportunity for a discussion on the role of assessing and developing emotional well-being and interpersonal skills in training programs.

Introduction

When I first started as a school psychologist, there were concerns expressed in my initial interview as to the quality of my character and my ability to relate to teachers, parents and students in an effective manner. The level of concern expressed by my future employer for finding an appropriate candidate with interpersonal skills seemed to overshadow the clinical expertise of my training and background. This led me to the question: what is the weight given to an individual's social skills as compared to their clinical skills in being an effective school psychologist; and what can be done in the training program to identify students with problem skills early in his/her training? The purpose of this paper is to explore the latter.

The Expanding Role of the School Psychologist

The role of the school psychologist is changing in response to the changes in the quality of schools and the children they serve. In the document, "School Psychology: A Blueprint for Training and Practice II," the authors contend that school psychologists are at the heart of these changes and being challenged to be the front line workers to pull students and schools through these changing times (Ysseldyke, Dawson, Lehr, Reschly, Reynolds, & Telzrow, 1997). The changes were also reflected in the current revision of the Professional Conduct Manual with the sections Consultation [4.3.1], Psychological and Psycho-educational Assessment [4.3.2], Direct Service [4.3.3], and Program Planning & Evaluation [4.3.6] all listing

some importance to interacting with professionals within the scope of being a school psychologist (National Association of School Psychologists, 1997).

Interpersonal communication, collaboration, and consultation is defined as the ability to listen well, participate in discussions, convey information, and work together with others at the individual, group and systems level (Ysseldyke et al., 1997). The importance of interpersonal skills is highlighted by being named not only one of the 10 core values that school psychologists should strive for, but one of only four values that all school psychologists should obtain to a high level of expertise (Ysseldyke et al.). The authors find these skills necessary to facilitate the communication and collaboration with students and teams of adults that are comprised of school personnel, families, and community professionals. The authors further identify that the graduate training for an individual with poor interpersonal skills and weak social competencies is a little known quality of graduate school education and that the absence of these prerequisite interpersonal and social skills may be an insurmountable barrier that will be difficult to remediate for effective graduate preparation.

Gilligan, Cobb, & Warner (2000) commented that for most of the training programs surveyed, three-quarters used the on-site interview as an identifier for candidate submission. Sattler (1992) noted that there are a number of dimensions within the interview and the effectiveness of the information gathered by this method is highly contingent upon the following: (a) the specific interviewer, (b) the interviewee, (c) the conditions under which the interview took place, and (d) the

potential interactions between these data points. This makes the determination of reliability and validity a difficult prospect. Still, Sattler argued it is important to determine the predictive validity of an interview. That is, how well can the interview predict the desired outcome (i.e., competent functioning school psychologists)? However, once in graduate school, few programs targeted interpersonal skill development for students until the practicum classes where students were already substantially invested in their education and impacting children in the field (Gilligan et al., 2000). To improve the selection of competent students for interpersonal and communication skills is important to meet the new demands of school psychologists.

The Millon Index of Personality Styles (MIPS)

The Millon Index of Personality Styles (MIPS) was designed to measure the personality styles of normally functioning adults (Millon, 1994). It is a 180-item, true false questionnaire designed to take 30 minutes or less when administered to normal adults between the ages of 18 and 65+.

The MIPS consists of 24 scales grouped into 12 pairs, with each pair containing two juxtaposed scales. In addition to the 24 scales, there are three validity indicators: Positive Impression, Negative Impression and Consistency.

There are three groupings to the scales presented in the MIPS: Motivating-Aims, Cognitive-Modes and Interpersonal Behaviors. The six scales of the Motivating-Aims grouping assess the individual's orientation toward obtaining reinforcement from the environment. The four pairs of the Cognitive-Modes scales

examine the styles of information processing. Finally, there are five pairs of Interpersonal-Behavior scales that assess the person's style of relating to others.

The Interpersonal-Behavior Scales

Millon (1994) defines the scales that define the Interpersonal-Behaviors grouping in the following manner:

- Retiring: High scores characterized by lack of affect and social indifference; Tend to be quiet, passive, and uninvolved.
- Outgoing: High scores indicate individuals that seek social stimulation, excitement and attention. They often react drastically to situations around them , but lose interest quickly.
- Hesitating: High scorers are usually shy, timid, and nervous in social situations. They are mistrusting, lonely and isolated.
- Asserting: High scores tend to feel that they are more competent and gifted than the people around them.
- Dissenting: These individuals scoring high on this scale tend to act out in an independent and nonconforming manner, often resisting to follow traditional standards.
- Conforming: High scores reveal upstanding individuals with self-control and tend to behave in a formal and proper way in social situations.
- Yielding: High results indicate individuals who are submissive, and self-demeaning. They are their own worst enemies.

- Controlling: Persons who score high on this scale are forceful, often domineering and socially aggressive.
- Complaining: These individuals are characterized by their tendency to be passive aggressive, sullen and generally dissatisfied.
- Agreeing: These individuals tend to be highly likeable socially, often relating to others in an agreeable manner.

Reliability & Validity

The scale has demonstrated adequate reliability and validity coefficients for a personality inventory. The coefficient alpha, computed to represent internal validity, averaged across the 10 Interpersonal-Behavior scales to be .79 (the range was .74 - .85). There was no difference in the internal stability of the measure between males and females. The stability of the test over two months is also adequate with the average across the 10 scales of .85 (the range was .79 - .90). The validity evidence that was presented in the manual indicated an appropriate degree of convergent and divergent validity. The correlations reported were conducted concurrently. The manual also depicted several applied research projects with military recruits, police officers, career decisions in college students, upper-level managers, middle-level managers and hourly municipal employees.

The question of this study is: what information can the MIPS provide to graduate trainers in the recruitment and selection of quality future school psychologists?

Method

Participants

There were sixteen school psychology student enrolled in a NASP approved training program participated in the study. There were 2 males and 14 females in the sample.

Procedures

Participants were administered the MIPS as a part of a class exercise to study the value of the MIPS as an assessment tool. For second year students (n=6), a practicum evaluation form was also collected. These evaluations were conducted after the first semester in a school psychology practicum. At this point, second year students had completed 200 hours in a regular and special education classroom and 300 hours under the supervision of a licensed school psychologist.

Results

For the quantitative analysis of the data, $p < .05$ was chosen for all statistical tests. For the 16 students who participated, the average score for the Total Adjustment was 54.50 (sd = 8.37). For the school psychology students, the following is a list of the means and the standard deviations on each of the scales (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

In addition, the calculation of whether the students "possessed" the trait to a level of at least the 50th percentile for that group was also calculated and contrasted with those students that showed an absence of the trait to at least the 50th percentile or greater or there was no discernable patter (i.e., a "mix," see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

The results of a Chi Square test to determine equal amounts of students possessing the different qualities revealed several significant results. The qualities that the school psychology students exhibited were Retiring (Low; $\chi^2(2, \underline{N} = 16) = 9.88, \underline{p} < .05$), Hesitating (Low; $\chi^2(2, \underline{N} = 16) = 7.63, \underline{p} < .05$), Dissenting (Low; $\chi^2(2, \underline{N} = 16) = 4.00, \underline{p} < .05$), Yielding (Low; $\chi^2(2, \underline{N} = 2) = 12.5, \underline{p} < .05$), Controlling (Low; $\chi^2(2, \underline{N} = 16) = 12.88, \underline{p} < .05$), Complaining (Low; $\chi^2(2, \underline{N} = 16) = 16.63, \underline{p} < .05$) and Agreeing (High; $\chi^2(2, \underline{N} = 16) = 9.88, \underline{p} < .05$).

The final area that was examined was to determine if there was a relationship to field supervisor practicum evaluations. There were no significant correlations between any of the Interpersonal-Behavior scales and the following questions: (a) professional in appearance and demeanor, (b) related well to community professionals, (c) related well to school personnel, (d) interacted appropriately with parents, (e) interacted appropriately with students, (f) consulted with teachers on school-based issues, (g) consulted with parents on home based issues, (h) presented results were clear, concise and appropriate. However, the number of cases that contained data for all of the correlations was six or fewer, as that represented the school psychology practicum class and some responses were "n/a" for the first reporting period.

Discussion

There is promising information provided in this pilot study of using the MIPS to classify students with interpersonal skills consistent with the demands of the

school psychology profession. There appeared to be a strong trend towards the poles of several of the scales. These scales included: Retiring (Low), Hesitating (Low), Dissenting (Low), Yielding (Low), Controlling (Low), Complaining (Low) and Agreeing (High). One of the concerns brought forth in this study is the absence of different traits. There was no information in the manual to describe low performance. However, when the high scores of the scales were examined, it was positive to see that most future school psychologists did not have these traits. The only significant high score on a scale was found on Agreeing and this was especially encouraging as it describes positive social skills and relating well to others. This can be viewed as an essential characteristic of school psychologists as they attempt to develop educational plans while balancing the desires of administrators, teachers and parents, while keeping the needs of the child a central focus. While there still needs to be validation of this pattern across all of the scales, training programs would be wise to scrutinize those students that did not follow this pattern.

The narrative information provided by the scoring program that was read by the trainers provided some insight into the personality functioning of the individual. However, the complexity of the narrative made it difficult to determine the strengths and the weaknesses of the individual in relation to the duties as a school psychologist. Students that were administered the questionnaire and read the narrative summary indicated a concern with the Barnum Effect. That is, the narrative report tended to offer vague descriptions of personality functioning and could have been attributed to any individual. In lieu of this concern, few

participants reported gaining any information from the narrative report to motivate them to identify problem areas and/or seek corrections to interpersonal concerns. However, there was one student who was profoundly affected by the statements in the report and was prompted to seek assistance for a long-standing concern. There was surprise exhibited by the student in regards to the accuracy of the report and the characterization of the student's behavior. Whether this student was reacting independently to the narrative report of the MIPS or the report confirmed the concerns were unclear.

In conclusion, the students did not all "clump" together for each and every scale. Therefore, there remains a question about the interpersonal competency of some of the individuals that did not conform to the mold. Do these individuals still possess the interpersonal skills to be proficient in the various assignments that school psychologists have? Is there one single area or areas that is more predictive of a successful school psychology candidate? Another characteristic that would be important for future research is to determine the predictive power of the MIPS for successfully completing the program and successfully remaining in the school psychology profession. The limitations of the study were consistent with any pilot study. That is, the numbers of students participating were few in number and conclusions need to be cautious at this time. This may become critically important to the selection of future school psychologists and the recruitment of potential school psychologists.

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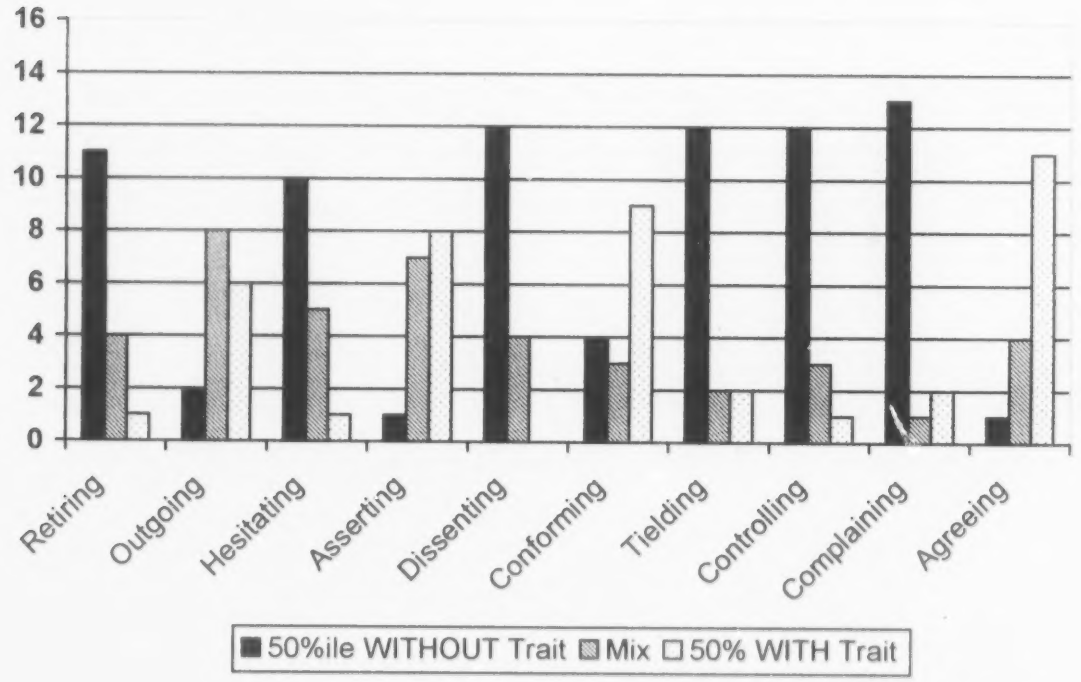
Table 1

Means and standard deviations of the Interpersonal Behavior scales

Scale	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Retiring	28.38	21.82	3	72
Outgoing	61.12	21.74	1	97
Hesitating	29.87	20.73	7	82
Asserting	62.25	22.67	6	91
Dissenting	18.50	18.61	0	49
Conforming	58.38	23.47	14	93
Yielding	30.31	24.57	3	94
Controlling	31.44	16.35	5	65
Complaining	21.87	24.67	1	80
Agreeing	63.06	17.29	12	89

Figure 1


16
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12
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8
6
4
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Retiring
Outgoing
Hesitating
Asserting
Dissenting
Conforming
Yielding
Controlling
Complaining
Agreeing
50%ile WITHOUT Trait
Mix
50% WITH Trait

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